

Testimony of South Farms Nursery School

South Farms Nursery School Staff

Before the Appropriations Committee

February 16, 2016

Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and members of the Committee

For the last 13 years, I have been a teacher in a preschool program in Middletown that has been funded with SR dollars since 1998. We currently serve 18 children; all of whom are occupying School Readiness slots. During my time here I, as well as my co-workers, have seen how quality early care and education can benefit young children by offering a safe, nurturing, and educational environment. There is also equality for all children through; high-quality early learning experiences, clear goals that provide a course of learning for children, and the provision of individual support based on each child's growth and development. Teachers' also benefit by gaining an understanding of age-appropriate content and an approach to children's learning. We know these children are learning these things because they we assess their development three (3) times annually, and plan for all children's individual needs based upon their assessment information. Planning can take us up to five (5) hours per week, because we choose topics of study children can relate to and are interested in, while also providing hands on learning experiences which challenge children's development.

Our program has also allowed and benefited our family's needs; adults can go to work reassured their children are in a safe, nurturing, quality-enhanced learning environment. In addition, families' gain the ability to understand what their children are learning and how they can support them. If this program was not available for children and families, then children would not have the readiness to attend public school grades, parents would lack involvement in their child's early learning experiences, we would lack in supporting the family's needs; there would also be a loss in building social and emotional skills, families may not be able to participate in the work force, and families would face having to look for other child care options which could cost much more than they could afford, etc.

We ask you to please protect the Quality Enhancement funding that is giving to the Middletown community. The funds provide 10 free trainings per year which help us obtain the mandated 20 hours of professional development (again an unfunded mandate). These funds also help to provide onsite coaching for teachers and the program at large surrounding the mandates, learning experience plans, and general early childhood best practices. These services are invaluable and we can't duplicate them on our already under funded budget.

We as educators and providers should be prepared to help children enter school ready to learn and equipped to address issues and factors which prevent children succeeding while in their later school years. Data systems linking pre-k to elementary schools, like those supported by the Race to the Top program, better equip schools to meet the needs of young children arriving to public schools from various early childhood settings. We need to give every child, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, the chance to succeed in school by investing in high quality early childhood education programs like School

Readiness. The benefits of such programs have been well documented. We know early childhood education significantly improves the scholastic success and the educational attainment of disadvantaged children even into adulthood. High quality programs are required in order for preschool attendance to produce positive outcomes. Two of the best known longitudinal studies on the long-term benefits of early childhood education are the High/Scope Perry Preschool Project and the Abecedarian Early Childhood Intervention Project. The Perry project found that individuals who were enrolled in a quality preschool program ultimately earned up to \$2,000 more per month than those who were not, and that young people who were in preschool programs were more likely to graduate from high school, to own homes, and to have longer marriages. The Abecedarian project offered similar and equally compelling results: Children in quality preschool programs are less likely to repeat grades, need special education, or get into future trouble with the law.

In closing, we oppose the 12 million dollar cut to the Office of Early Childhood, and also oppose the block grant approach being proposed by the Governor as it removes transparency from the State budget, and leaves our program in the dark as to how to proceed in serving our children and families. We work on shoe string budgets now, meeting unfunded State licensing mandates, NAEYC mandates and School Readiness mandates. We are working at or below the poverty level, and hold BA degree's with large college loans, and need State assistance to survive. Even though our state is experiencing a difficult economic time, as you focus on our state budget, please consider the benefits provided to thousands of Connecticut's young children and their families attending our high quality School Readiness programs. Children need us because they can't vote. They have no political voice or lobbying power. Therefore, as adults, we must be their voice. Our state's investment in these programs continues to be a win-win situation for young children and their families. In a tight-budget time, this investment remains money well-spent, for our young children of Connecticut are our futures!

Cordially,

South Farms Nursery School Teachers
261 Ridge Road
Middletown, CT 06457
860-344-1179

Sources:

1. *Research Studies and Task Force Reports Can Help You Advocate for High-Quality Early Childhood Education.* <https://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/ResearchStudies.pdf>
2. *High Scope Perry Preschool Study.* www.highscope.org/Content.asp?ContentId=219
- 3) [Nieer.org](http://nieer.org); *A Benefit Cost Analysis of the Abecedarian Early Childhood Intervention*, By Leonard N. Masse W. Steven Barnett <http://nieer.org/resources/research/AbecedarianStudy.pdf>
- 4) Original Articles; *Early Childhood Education: Young Adult Outcomes From the Abecedarian Project*, Applied Developmental Science **Volume 6, Issue 1**, 2002, pages 42-57, Published online: 04 Jun 2010; http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1207/S1532480XADS0601_05